Picturing Sagalassos

The Archive as a Bridge between Past and Present

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Abstract

Photography has, right from the beginning, a close relationship with archaeology. Although primarily used as a scientific recording tool, photography can bring much more to archaeology. "(in)site Sagalassos", a practice based research project, tries to broaden the archaeological practice based on a new lecture of the early photographic heritage. Archives can, in that sense, act as a bridge between past and present.

Résumé

La photographie a, dès ses origines, eu des rapports privilégiés avec l'archéologie. Sa fonction archéologique ne peut être réduite à celle d'enregistrement et de documentation. Le présent article se propose de discuter les enjeux d'un projet artistique dans le domaine de la photographie archéologique : « (in)site Sagalassos ». Un des traits spécifiques de ce projet est le dialogue créateur avec la photographie ancienne et la reconceptualisation de l'archive comme passerelle entre passé et présent.

Keywords

archaeology, documentary, (in)site project, rephotography, Sagalassos

How It All Started

In 1885 and 1886 the Polish count Karol Lanckoronski organised two expeditions to Pamphylia and Pisidia, Turkey, surveying the major archaeological sites of the region. These travels resulted in 1892 in a two-volume publication, *Städte Pamphyliens und Pisidiens*.[1] The publication, lavishly decorated with engravings, is one of the earliest visual accounts on Sagalassos, an ancient Roman city currently being excavated by the Sagalassos Archaeological Research Project (KU Leuven). These engravings formed a major inspiration to set up a practice based research project on the relation between photography and archaeology.

Karl Graf Lanckoroński-Brzezie, Städte Pamphyliens und Pisidiens , Band 2 Pisidien *(Wien: Temsky 1892), p .153*[2]

In 2003 Bruno Vandermeulen and Danny Veys, both photographers, joined the Sagalassos excavation to register the finds and structures. In 2007 they compiled a book on Sagalassos with documentary style photography, *(in)site Sagalassos*.[3] At the same time both photographers experienced a renewed interest

1. Karl Graf Lanckoroński-Brzezie, *Städte Pamphyliens und Pisidiens* (Wien: Temsky 1892).
2. Universitätsbibliothek Heidelberg http://digi.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/diglit/lanckoronski1892bd2/0157/
3. Bruno Vandermeulen and Danny Veys, *(in)site Sagalassos* (Leuven: Peeters Publishers, 2008).

into early photography and started using a large format analog camera during the excavation as a side-project on archaeology and photography: "(in)site Sagalassos: site-specific photography revised". As photography and archaeology are linked right from the earliest stage in the development of photography, image research in archives was a necessity. In view of this connection, the typical use of photography in archaeology was also explored and formed the basis of the project.

During the course of the project, they visited the site several times before and during the excavation season in summer. In the spring they concentrated more on landscape and architecture, during the excavation the attention was drawn more on the process and the interaction with the people working there. Not only the site itself was the focus of their attention, but also the ancient territory of Sagalassos, some 1200 km^2 wide. By doing so, they were able to take into account the broader setting of the site.

Some History on Archaeology and Photography

In 1839 François Arago, member of the Académie des sciences, pledged in favour of the new invention photography. He not only pointed out its significance to art and science in general, but also specifically stressed the usefulness for archaeology:

> To copy the millions of hieroglyphics which cover event the exterior of the great monuments of Thebes, Memphis, Karnak, and others would require decades of time and legions of draughtsmen. By daguerreotype one person would suffice to accomplish this immense work successfully. Equip the Egyptian Institute with two or three of Daguerre's apparatus, and before long innumerable hieroglyphics as they are in reality will replace those which now are invented or drawn by approximation.[4]

Merely a few years after the invention of photography, between 1841 and 1844 Joseph-Philibert Girault de Prangey travelled to Greece, Turkey, Palestine and Egypt photographing sites, structures and landscapes. These daguerreotypes are of the earliest known from that region. Other photographers followed soon after: Emile Béchard, Francis Frith, Maxime Du Camp, and many others travelled to the east photographing archaeological remains, producing photo albums to be sold at home or in the framework of expeditions.

4. Quoted by Frederic N. Bohrer, *Photography and archaeology* (London: Reaction Books, 2011), p. 28.

Bruno Vandermeulen & Danny Veys Rock-cut shelters in the canyon of the Serenamework of expeditions. *velled to the east photograph*

The first formal use of photography during an archaeological excavation was in Egypt in 1842-1843, an excavation led by Karl Richard Lepsius[5]. Soon after that photography was more and more incorporated into the archaeological recording practice, but at the same time, archaeology was, and still is, struggling with the concept of photography.

One of the first manuals (1924) on the photographic practice in archaeology was written by George Andrew Reisner, an American archaeologist most known for his excavations of the Giza necropolis. He emphasized that field photography is a fundamental element in the archaeological process. His manual tellingly starts with the title "The Limitations of Photography" and continues: "The chief use of photography is to record mechanically the facts revealed by skilful excavation and correctly observed by a trained excavator." [6] Another important manual is by Maurice Cookson. In *Photography for archaeologists* (1954) he tries to standardize the photographic practice on an archaeological site. A photo clearly is evidence to him. In his foreword of the book Mortimer Wheeler writes: "Mr Cookson and I have striven together to induce the camera to record factually the archaeological evidence presented to it". Yet he continues in a sobering way: "The basic trouble is, of course, that the camera is an awful liar".[7]

5. Ibid., p 35
6. Peter Der Manuelian and George Andrew Reisner, "George Andrew Reisner on Archaeological Photography", *Journal of the American Research Center in Egypt*, Vol. 29 (1992), pp. 1-34.
7. M. B. Cookson, *Photography for archaeologists* (London: Max Parish, 1954), p. 5

In archaeology the discussion about a particular photo is always on what is shown, but never on how the image is taken, its point of view, its framing, in short on the photographic practice and its influence on (the interpretation of) what is depicted. As excavating is a very destructive process, photography is used as a scientific recording tool and images act as evidence. Apart from photographs, drawings and plans are also made during the recording of an excavation. Comparing drawings and photographs, drawings seem clearer, showing only what is important. Making a drawing is about reduction of detail, leaving out insignificant elements. When you compare a photo to a drawing, it is as if a photo is showing too much detail and lacks clarity due to the abundance of information. But, a drawing is made by hand and thus very subjective as the draughtsman/archaeologist decides what is important and what to leave out.

Bruno Vandermeulen & Danny Veys, 2009 The collapsed architectural remains of the so-called South Gate, at the start of the Colonnaded Street

A Contemporary Project on Archaeology and Photography

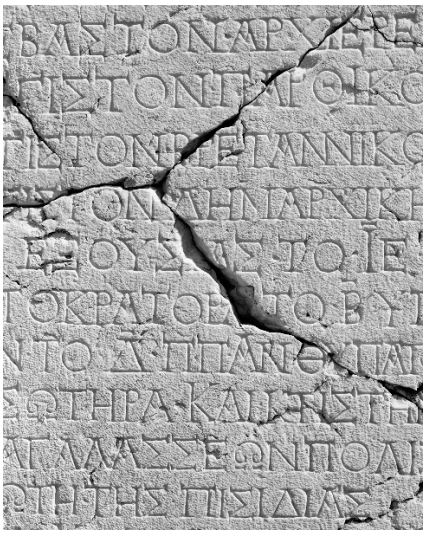
Within the (in)site project, we started out from the archaeological photographical practice. During the normal recording routines of a present day excavation, we use digital cameras. As a contrast to that and, more importantly, as a link to the early photographers, the choice of using an analog large format camera and black and white film was deliberate. It forces you to use a different methodology compared to working digital. Using a digital camera, you have immediate feedback on what and how you are photographing by looking at the screen on the back of the camera. You can take an unlimited number of photos and delete as you wish. The result is a myriad of images spanning around your subject as a web.

Working with a large format camera is different. It is big and heavy, requiring the use a tripod. Setting up camera and tripod takes time, you are making the composition on the ground glass upside

down, you are standing next to the camera when pressing the shutter, the amount of film holders you can carry is limited, thus the amount of images you can make during the day is also limited… It slows down the process considerably forcing you to make very distinct choices. The photo is a sublimation of the last decisions you made, so to speak. Instead of *taking* photos, you are *making* images, you are working with the subject. You are entering a "mode of engagement" [8]. In the framework of the project we made images, instead of taking (scientific) images, in analogy to the draughtsman who makes a drawing. In that sense is photography not all that different from archaeology, as both are about relationships and both are transformative practices.

Influences and models

In preparation of and during the project, the work of early photographers as Auguste Salzmann, Maxime Du Camp, Francis Frith, Timothy O'sullivan, William Henry Jackson and others was seminal. The story and the work of Auguste Salzmann (1824-1872) is particularly interesting. Early in the 1850's the French archaeologist Félix de Saulcy was the centre of a heated discussion on the dating of the remains of the temple of Jerusalem. Salzmann, while travelling, changed his plans and headed in January 1954 to Jerusalem in order to help his friend de Saulcy. Staying there for four months, he produced over 170 paper negatives demonstrating de Saulcy's thesis. His images are both scientific and artistic with great attention to composition, light, structure and texture and are still very modern. In his work, Salzmann focuses on the camera's ability to pay particular attention to objects [9]; contrary to the work of Maxime Du Camp and fellow photographers for instance.



Bruno Vandermeulen & Danny Veys, 2009 The central portion of the inscribed, square soccle for an honorific monument dedicated to Caracalla (AD 211-217), on the Upper Agora. At the bottom, the inscription includes Sagalassos' honorary title: The venerable city of the Sagalassians, first city of Pisidia, friend and ally of the Roman people.

8. Michael Shanks and Connie Svabo, "Photography and Archaeology, a pragmatology", in *Reclaiming Archaeology, beyond the tropes of medernity*, edited by Alfrede Gonzàlez-Ruibal (London: Routledge, 2013), p. 100

9. Randy Norman Innes, *On the limits of the work of art: The fragment in Visual Culture (*Ann Arbor: Michigan UP, 2009).

Photography at that time was still a very costly, difficult to master and laborious process not many people practiced. It required the use of a huge camera, a mobile darkroom for immediate development, safe transport of chemicals and glass plates, etc. Producing a photograph was an art of avoiding errors [10]. Making a photo was a deliberate process with a very specific goal, whether it be commercial, institutional or scientific. The choice of using a large format camera within the *(in)site* project was very much influenced by the above.

Apart from the more famous examples above, Vandermeulen and Veys also looked for historical photos on the archaeological site of Sagalassos. The earliest known photos are by Paul Trémaux, made in 1882. In his publication *Exploration archéologique en Asie Mineure* he included two photos of the roman theatre.[11] In April 1907 Gertrude Bell visits the site and makes 16 photos of the site partly covered by snow. The images are a mixture of overviews and details. Both her images and her diary can be accessed online at the Gertrude Bell Archive. [12]

The engravings in the publication of Lanckoronski and the photos in the Bell archive are the most extensive early visual accounts of Sagalassos. While setting up the *(in)site* project, one of the first ideas was to develop a rephotography project of the material found in archives in analogy with the *Rephotography Survey Project* (RSP).

Bruno Vandermeulen & Danny Veys, 2008-2009 The Odeion

10. After the title of the book by Laurie Dahlberg, *Victor Regnault and the advance of Photography : The art of Avoiding Errors* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005).
11. Pierre Trémaux, *Exploration archéologique en Asie mineure* (Paris, Librairie de L. Hachette et C.,1858)
12. http://www.gerty.ncl.ac.uk

Within the RSP, 19th century US military and geological survey photographs are paired with contemporary views from exactly the same points of view (vantage point), revealing how the site is now as opposed to how it was. Originally the project, initiated by Mark Klett, Ellen Manchester and JoAnn Verburg, lasted from 1977 till 1979, culminating in a monumental publication: *Second View*.[13] In 2004 appeared *Third Views, Second Sights*, an update on some of the views.[14] Over 120 19th century photographs were rephotographed by the RSP, mainly images by Timothy O'Sullivan and William Henry Jackson. The project had a scientific approach, trying to match as closely as possible the original image. JoAnn Verburg in her preface writes: "Unlike our predecessors, we did not take what we thought would be appealing shots. Instead we did a survey of a survey".[15]

Although very simple from a conceptual point of view, the project turned out to be very challenging from a technical point of view: finding the exact locations, finding the exact vantage points, duplicating the camera movements, time of exposure, lighting differences, …

> "Comparing the original survey photographers view with the contemporary site was by far the most provocative aspect of our fieldwork. First, because it was a shock to see that that the place didn't look like the picture, second, because we could compare what was included in the frame and what was left out, and third, because it is a way to experience a hundred years through a very simple comparison."[16]

19th century images used to be considered very neutral images and faithful representations made during scientific surveys. Yet remaking them has learned the RSP a lot about the personal preferences and individual decisions of the early photographers. Jackson for instance, seemed to like standing level or above his subject, looking for the best general view. O'Sullivan was less predictable, photographing his subjects from a multitude of views, often with a reference of (human) scale. Both photographers preferred working with a wide-angle lens. O'Sullivan almost always corrected perspective through tilt and shift, Jackson much less. If this was due to the fact they used different equipment is not known. When both photographers shot the same view or subject, these differences in style become very apparent.

Unfortunately, the archival material found on Sagalassos was not extensive enough to initiate such a campaign. Instead we selected about 10 different locations on the site, which we rephotographed during the course of the project. These images show the course of the excavation over time and, as the excavator takes away the layers of soil, one could argue that the old land/cityscape is restored. In that sense one both advances and moves back in time.

Other, more photographic techniques were used when appropriate. The large format camera enables the front lens of the camera to tilt, shift and swing. That way the plane of focus can be put where you want

13. Mark Klett, Ellen Manchester, JoAnn Verburg, Godron Bushaw and Ri Dingus, *Second View* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1984).
14. Mark Klett, Kyle Bajakian, William L. Fox, Michael Marchall, Toshi Ueshina and Byron Wolfe, *Third Views, Second Sights* (Albuquerque: Museum of New Mexico Press, 2004).
15. Mark Klett, Ellen Manchester, JoAnn Verburg, Godron Bushaw and Ri Dingus, *Second View* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1984), p. 9
16. Ibid., p. 8

it to be, even crossing the film plane. This is called the *Scheimpflug* principle or better known today as the tilt/shift effect. As a result only a line in the image is well in focus. We applied this technique both to landscape and excavation photography, drawing the attention of the viewer to what is important, in focus, and obscuring out the unimportant, out of focus. When photographing activities also multiple exposures were taken, rephotographing the same point of view on one sheet of film.

Bruno Vandermeulen & Danny Veys, 2008 The excavations along the south façade of the Roman Baths (120-161 AD) necessitated the removal of the structural collapse caused by the early seventh century AD earthquake.

Starting out from excavation photography, the project tries to enter into a dialogue with the work made during the pioneering years of photography. The use of various techniques results in a very layered approach to both photography and archaeology and where photography is practiced as a "mode of engagement". It is

> (…) a highly complex approach of the photographic fact. Simple notions usually perceived as unproblematic, such as scale, sharpness or point of view, interpreted in a multitude of scales, sharpnesses and points of view. To a certain extent, Vandermeulen and Veys's work appears as an archaeology of excavation photography.17

17. Jan Baetens, "The Archaeology of Excavation Photography", in *Extra Fomu Magazine*, issue 10, 2012, pp. 153.

Bruno Vandermeulen & Danny Veys, 2010 The excavations along the south façade of the Roman Baths (120-161 AD) necessitated the removal of the structural collapse caused by the early seventh century AD earthquake.

The projects discussed in this article, *(in)site* as well as the *Rephotography Survey Project*, could not have existed without access to photographic archives. They form gateways to revisit the past and reflect on the present. Each project has its own distinct lecture of the past, bridging past and present.

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